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HINTS TO A LAYMAN.



HINTS

TO

A L A Y M A N.

By Austin Allibone

“It is a shocking sight,
When children of one family
Fall out, and chide, and fight.”

NURSERY BALLADS.

“How much more shocking when the children are grown men and
women—and the family is the CHURCH.”

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

PHILADELPHIA:

C. G. HENDERSON & CO.

1853.

1871

January 1st - New Year's Day
February 1st - Valentine's Day
March 1st - St. Patrick's Day
April 1st - Good Friday
May 1st - Mother's Day
June 1st - Father's Day
July 1st - Independence Day
August 1st - Labor Day
September 1st - National Day
October 1st - Halloween
November 1st - Thanksgiving
December 1st - Christmas

HINTS TO A LAYMAN.

LETTER I.

MESSRS. C. G. HENDERSON AND CO.

GENTLEMEN :

IN this day of the multitudinous issue of the press, it is a pleasing sign to those who think that man's spiritual and moral nature is his highest glory, to find an increasing attention among American authors, to questions connected with the development and welfare of that nature. The genius of our people is so entirely practical, that there is but little encouragement for writers to engage in the illustration of great principles in almost any department of thought. Eminent foreigners have remarked this in-

tense direction of our life to what is visible and tangible, to what has visible and palpable and measurable results; and while they have admitted that the general mind of the country is far more alive to questions that range above mere material interests, than is the case among the nations of Europe, they have been justified nevertheless, in stating, that, as regards works of profound reflection, there are fewer to appreciate them than among any other civilized nation. That this should be so, is perfectly natural in the history of a new people, but it is perhaps time that our attention should be turned to the fact, and something done to increase a taste for such study. We have been led to these remarks by the recent perusal of a work which appeared from the pen of one of our own citizens, on a theme which, though pre-eminently practical in its object, has been discussed by him, with an elevation of thought which betokens a better spirit than that which has

been common among us, in the examination of questions bearing on the greatest of human interests, and involving others of the utmost depth and comprehension. We hail this book, not because we agree with all its conclusions, but because it seems to us to mark a new era in our country in the treatment of great questions that go down to the depths of human nature and society. There have never been wanting men of great speculative ability among us, at any period; a few, but very few, might be named, who in this respect would compare with the thinkers of any age or nation; but as a general thing, the remark of M. de Tocqueville is undeniable, and indeed, with a large class even of intelligent men, it is by no means felt to be a reproach to us, that "in no country is so little attention paid to philosophy." By philosophy, in this connexion, we do not mean any system of metaphysical science (though it be true in that sense too), nor any mere speculation on

the mysteries of our being, transcendental or other,—but we mean the spirit that leads men of reflection to probe all questions to the bottom, to examine them on all sides, to view them from some point where an impartial estimate can be formed of them, to rest not in conclusions of authority, but “to scrutinize all things,” in order to intelligent conviction, to the full limit of the power of man. The free spirit of our people does indeed well fit them for such investigations; but their thoughts have as yet been little turned into such channels; and though we have freed ourselves from all arbitrary authority in the government of the state, and claim to have the convictions of an unshackled conscience, it may be that in the midst of this invaluable freedom we are still in thralldom to some more subtle tyrant than any king or hierarch, in our undue devotion to some inferior interest, our unworthy fear of cliques, or of some self-styled public opinion, or, in a word, to

some enslaving prejudice, which, however venerable, from antiquity, or association, or universality, can be shown, in the end, to have no other basis than human ignorance or folly. With this view of our national characteristics in matters of thought, we are disposed, as we have said, to regard the work entitled, "New Themes for the Protestant Clergy," with much favour, from the truly independent tone in which the matter is treated. This element, or the philosophical spirit, the author certainly has. Some may think he pushes it too far; but whether this be so or not, we think no one can deny it the merit of being that genuine independence of thought which becomes the impartial seeker for truth; which is as remote as possible from that spurious conceit, mistaken for it by many, which makes a man abjure the wisdom of the past, and madly dream that everything, in every science, must be settled *de novo*. Nor is it alone in this spirit that we discern a better

sort of thinking than is ordinarily brought to bear on topics of the kind discussed by our author. Confessedly defective as the book is in arrangement, the writer exhibits both power and elevation of thought, far beyond what is usually seen when a man attempts to treat a subject of this kind in a popular way. Great as are the advantages of method, it is but the framework of thought, and as it has not been used in this case, we think it a stronger proof of the author's real intellectual merit, that, coming before us without the adventitious aid of a logically ordered concentration of reasoning, he should still have impressed so many competent judges with the force and value of his main positions. But though not systematically arranged, we have many proofs that this has not sprung from an illogical habit of mind, as the Reviewer styled A Layman so sagely supposes. Only a mere verbal logician could object as he does on page 55, that "statements and counter-

statements, affirmatives and negatives, on the same questions," necessarily prove a loose and inconsistent reasoner. However this may be in the naked forms of logic (and it is not always true even there), those who know that logic only embraces a part of our intellectual processes, are aware that in all the higher regions of thought, nay, in all where the proof is not demonstrative, there are innumerable seeming contradictions, which are only seeming, and that principles, in all the range of moral science, appear to a narrow vision to be opposed, which a more comprehensive survey shows to be consistent. Logical precision, when it can be rightly used, is certainly an invaluable element of power for any writer, but the Reviewer was never more mistaken, if he supposes that all minds, deservedly deemed logical, have always exhibited this trait, even when treating on subjects that above all others demand it. The great Locke is not unfrequently a striking instance of this,

as several critics have remarked. Though a giant in logical power, his desire to rescue Philosophy from the technicalities with which the schoolmen had oppressed her, led him, at times, when writing in that plain way of which he speaks, to forget the very danger of ambiguous and undefined terms, against which he so convincingly inveighs as the source of endless prejudices and misunderstandings. Yet who shall dare to say, because of this, that he was a loose, rambling writer? Gold is no less gold because it has a measure of alloy. There are, we grant, many apparently conflicting positions taken by the author of *New Themes*, which, did we not know his design, we would say, were irreconcilable; but knowing *that*, they assume a different aspect, and without any forcing, may easily be shown to be compatible. The very strong view he takes of a particular truth, which is common to all who have a great truth to impart, does indeed at times savour of a

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degree of one-sidedness, which is alien from the true philosophical character; but the more we reflect on the purpose he has in view, and the more we consider the breadth of mental grasp which he so generally exhibits, the less disposed are we to regard him as defective in that characteristic of a wise and far-seeing mind. But though it should even be admitted that some defect of this kind attached to his writing, the great value and undoubted truth of the principles he insists on, considered in their positive character, would make it a matter of comparatively small account. We regard the author as sounding the *key-note* of a useful *reform* in the prevailing type of our Christianity, and hence he appears before the world, rather as a reformer than as a philosophical writer. We doubt not that his modesty would disclaim either title; but the world may judge differently; and while to us he seems to show the power of each, it is in the former, rather than the latter,

that he appears as a writer. From the nature of the case, then, we cannot expect the same impartial weighing of every matter in him who would arouse a sleeping world and a sleeping church to some juster conception of their vast responsibilities. Such has ever been the case with reformers. Witness the exaggerations of Luther, on the subject of good works; which were, however, ably vindicated by Calvin. Says that great man,—“You will say that Luther’s mode of expression sounds hyperbolical. I allow this, but contend that he had good reason for it; he saw the world in mortal slumber, through false confidence in the holiness of works, and despaired of awakening it by words:—the trumpet only could arouse it; thunder and lightning seemed necessary to him.”*

In fact, in reading some of the more pointed denunciations of the evils that prevail in our churches, which have so need-

* Henry’s Life of Calvin, vol. i. p. 493.

lessly excited the fears of "A Layman," lest the Church should suffer from a false friend, we have been reminded of the manner in which Joseph made himself strange to his brethren, that they might be the more deeply sensible of their fault. We doubt not that this was the intention of the author of *New Themes*; and the response which he has met from many quarters, where a different result might have been feared, shows that he judged wisely, and that there was ground for his rebukes, and will, we hope, be an evidence to him, that however far the Church has wandered, she still has sons who can bear reproof with meekness, and seek a better knowledge of their Master's law. Having now stated our impression that this book, considered as a contribution to Christian ethics, indicates a growing appreciation in our community of the value of moral discussions, and having expressed our estimate of the power and skill the author brings to his task, we

would set forth what we understand to be the great principle he endeavours to enforce throughout his pages, which has been most sadly misconceived. Not only is this the case with A Layman, on whose vision it does not seem even to have dawned, but with many others, and especially some clerical reviewers. The pique of the latter, at some rather hard rubs from the author of *New Themes*, can hardly excuse the small measure of justice dealt to him, when one remembers that their familiarity with the subject discussed should have led them to admit the force and seasonableness of the main doctrine advanced, and to have made many allowances for what would seem to them a depreciation of other principles not less momentous. The much-neglected principle, then, which our author wishes to implant with living power again in the consciousness and the conscience of the Church, is neither more nor less than the simple, all-pervading, all-working principle of Christian

love; that gentle, but most mighty power, which, springing from the bosom of God, once blessed the universe in creation, blessed it again in redemption, and still seeks, in all the carrying out of the wondrous plan, to bless the souls and bodies, the temporal and eternal being, of the myriads of Adam's race. Alas! thou heaven-descended Charity! blind and hard are men, when one must plead for thee! We conclude this letter, by declaring our belief, that, whatever be the faults, either in matter or manner, of our author, this his main position is wholly impregnable. In our next, we will state it more definitely, and our reasons for believing it.

Respectfully yours.

LETTER II.

WE stated in the close of our last letter what we deemed the main object of the author of *New Themes*. As the point is one of great importance, and as he has been much misunderstood, we will endeavour to present it in a light which will make it difficult to mistake it, and also show some of the consequences involved in his main principle. Assuming, as admitted by all who acknowledge the authority of Christ, that the precept "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is the second great command, and is like to the first, and while second to it in order, is second to it alone in importance, he contends that, too often under the cover of zeal for the first, and in many other ways, the Christian Church has practically lost sight of the inherent, far-reaching obligation of the law of love. The author's main

theme then resolves itself into two:—1st. That the love of our neighbour, in all the forms demanded by our varied relations to him, is a cardinal duty of the Christian system. 2d. That Christians, as such, have most deplorably failed in yielding an obedience to this command at all commensurate with the pure, and spiritual, and elevated character of its requirements. In regard to the duty itself, if it be needful to urge its paramount claims on any in civilized and Christian communities, this itself shows something essentially wrong in the state of one thus in the dark. Yet we are by no means sure that there are none who would not be for giving this virtue and this grace a subordinate place in their religious system. Thus, when love of men as brethren is urged, has it not been often replied, that brethren in Christ is meant in the injunction? And when, again, even that limited benevolence was brought home as implying a warm regard for the welfare of all that are truly

Christ's, of every name, who, alas! has not known instances where the duty was practically denied, because the party to whom it was due gathered not with them, and was looked on with coldness and suspicion, because, though working and living to the glory of Christ, he followed not the same standard-bearer, and uttered not the same Shibboleth? So, again, if one should urge the general obligations of benevolence, and remind Christians of their duties to all as fellow-beings, sprung from a common source, created by a common Father, and bought with the same precious blood, how often, though these be admitted, do we find no practical recognition of this spirit as one of the highest fruits that faith in the Gospel can produce? Let none say, then, that there is no need to show that love to our neighbour is an imperative duty: facts that stare us in the face prove that it is needful. What Christian, for example, has acquitted his conscience of his duty to street beggars? Of ten who may pass one, and

who are favourably situated for his relief, are there five who would give any aid that might reasonably be expected from those who are commanded to "give to him that asketh of thee?" One will plead his haste; another, on principle, never gives to street beggars; a third thinks them all impostors; a fourth says there are societies established to relieve them, and passes by; a fifth reminds you that there are limitations to human responsibility, and that if he gave to every applicant, he would soon have nothing to give. Thus, if one-half are so easily supplied with excuses, which are too common to be fictitious, we may well doubt if, of the remainder, there would be a majority to act the part of the Good Samaritan. Take another case: we are far from thinking that the external divisions of the body of Christ must necessarily impair its true unity; but who that is not blinded by party spirit can pretend to justify the miserable alienations between sects that even admit the safety of

those in either communion? Nay, not to limit the matter thus—where do we see, even in the case of those separated from us by fundamental error, anything that would bear to be compared with that divine, all-conquering love, which the Author of truth exhibited towards the blaspheming deniers of his claims and murderers of his person? Hatred of the error we have, and this is well; but full as much, we fear, hatred of the errorist, which too often forbids, we do not say charity, but even justice. These things ought not to be so; but since they are so, it becomes those to whom it is for a lamentation, to look for a remedy. We think the author of *New Themes* has suggested the true one, by simply calling the attention of the Christian world back to the neglected truism, if you will, that our religion is, in its origin, in its essence, in its precepts, its spirit and its effects, a religion of love. The deepest and most precious truths are ever the oldest; and though he calls his book *New Themes*, it has

been truly said that they are as old as Christianity. Indeed, in some respects they are as old as creation; for, as the law of God is eternal, and its obligations unchangeable, the germ of the duties insisted on has had place under every dispensation; and if, in the meridian blaze of the gospel day, they are quietly ignored, after all the ineffable sanctions that have been added to them by the work and authority of the Son of God, not the heathen merely, but the earth herself will cry out against us. But though these themes be old, as relating to duties that belong to man as man, they are new—too new, we fear, from the long-continued and wide-spread neglect of them. In fact, our author is but recalling the attention of the Church to the remarkable fact—which, somehow, she has most remarkably forgotten—that our blessed Lord, who came not to destroy the law, when about to leave his disciples, said to them, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that

ye also love one another;" and as if this were not sanction enough, he adds, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." This divine injunction is re-echoed, as it were, by that beloved apostle who, after he had leaned on the Master's breast, had, with the others, heard this gracious word. His language is peculiar, and shows, as we have said, the precept is at once old and new. "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but the old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, because the darkness is past and the true light now shineth." The context shows that the commandment referred to is love to the brethren.

The author of *New Themes* has endeavoured to show the justice of his charge by a variety of instances, some of which we hope to examine hereafter. Our object in

this letter has been to show there was ground for the charge generally, and especially that the great law of love—that which the apostle James calls the royal law—has been in many ways degraded from its place, and forced to take a very subordinate position. We will, however, before closing this, notice one way referred to by our author, in which this has been done, which we must treat of more thoroughly hereafter, but which we can only now touch upon, to add our testimony to the justice of the charge, at least in part. We refer to the charge that systematic theology has had the effect, from the disproportionate attention paid to it, of setting aside the practical obligation of this law. “Layman” is profoundly shocked by the manner in which our author speaks on this subject. His strictures on this point may be found on pages 36 and 37 of his Review. We will examine the inferences of Layman, and then state our own impression of the matter. The amount of his inference from

our author's words is, that he speaks of the doctrines of the Gospel with such gross irreverence as to warrant one who did not, from other sources, know the contrary, in setting him down as an infidel. We have a simple answer to this charge: the author regards the Christian theology of the Scriptures as not entirely identical with that set forth in formularies and the general teaching of the Church; not that he denies those formularies, but that he regards the whole impression made by them, and by the same doctrines as taught in Scripture, to be different. We do not entirely agree with the author as to the full validity of his view on this topic; but we insist that he is entitled to the benefit of this obvious distinction. We wish, especially for the sake of the success of his cause, that he had used a somewhat different tone on this head, that he might not seem to disparage what we are persuaded he deems most precious; but in the face of the above distinction, without any allowance for the undue

earnestness almost inseparable from a favourite idea, or any regard to the admission of the author's preface, that "some of his expressions require qualification," to charge him with irreverence and infidelity, argues either great dulness or great want of candour. Now, while we think this defence good against the strictures of Layman—who should have sharpened his wits or stirred up his charity before writing these pages, as well as many more of his review—we must say, that we do not think our author is wholly free from censure as regards the manner in which he has set forth the topic in question. We believe that when he wrote the pages under review, the idea of an approach to a depreciation of any doctrine deemed sacred by true Christians was remote from his thoughts. In this case, as in some others, we think he has fallen into an error, like that of the reformers, whose unsparing zeal against error sometimes led them to disparage what their successors, in calmer times,

have found to be of value. As we have before remarked, the method he has pursued has its advantages: it excites attention; it stimulates inquiry; but still we must ever remember that it has its limit, and that a very narrow one, since Truth will admit no pleading in her favour that does not bear the stamp of her own unvarying impartiality. Having stated this exception to the author's tone, while we regard the suggestions based on it by Layman as eminently unjust and unworthy, we have two things to say in reference to the principle itself, for which the author contends. The first is, that his view of the office of systematic theology does not answer to what we think can be shown to be its true function from the Scriptures. This, however, is a theme too extensive to be treated now; let us be understood, while we have a decided conviction on this point; we are far from denying, nay, we rejoice, that the author has so clearly shown how an erroneous estimate of the all-sufficiency of a

theology of formulas merely has done vast disservice both to the Church and the world. Our second remark is, that one palpable evil which he justly attributes to this source, is the bitter root of sectarianism. Truly, if anything can wound charity—if anything can conflict with “the love of the gospel”—it is this. It is not our intention to enlarge upon this; we conceive that the author has ably stated the truth on this point on pages 92 and 93.

Hoping to engage in a fuller discussion of these points again, in our next we will offer some remarks on the spirit of the charges made by A Layman and others against our author, of aiding the cause of infidelity.

Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

THE charge of A Layman against the author of New Themes, of having written in an infidel spirit, has led us into a train of reflection which we hope may be more useful than any detailed answer to such a charge.

There is a species of oppression which he who endures all else, never will endure. It is that sense of wrong which he who feels it at all, feels most acutely.

You may invade a man's opinions one by one, and dispossess him of them all, until you interfere with his religious sentiments, and his rights of conscience. You then strike a spring whose elasticity increases with its pressure—rallying every other power in the system, and quickening the motion of them all. You provoke his love of truth, his regard of early impressions, his sense of duty, his hopes of happiness, his pride, his zeal,

his obstinacy, his chagrin, and his resentment.

He who would willingly encounter these knows nothing of the lessons of history. It appears to be the decree of God that religious persecution shall avail its authors only shame and remorse—while it endows its victims with extraordinary courage, insures them the divine protection, and fits them for heroic suffering and achievement.

There are two species of emancipation to be accomplished in perfecting the freedom of man, the one of the conscience, the other of the person, and history shows that they have ever gone hand in hand, in the progress of reform. Emancipation of conscience produced the Protestant Church, but liberty of conscience includes that of thought and opinion, the free exercise and expression of which is inconsistent with personal bondage; and therefore the new-born church, like the dove of the ark, never found rest for the sole of her foot, till her principles had produced

the civil liberty of the American Republic. The doctrine of the rights of conscience proclaimed by Roger Williams, in the colony of Massachusetts, became the animating spirit of that free constitution, one of whose framers re-echoed it in the sentiment, that even "error of opinion may be tolerated when reason is left free to combat it."

This was the sentiment of a mind too deeply tinctured indeed with the infidel philosophy of Europe, but it involves a great principle, in the prevalence of which truth has nothing to fear; it is not the use, but the abuse of reason that has injured Christianity; not right but perverted reason. To deny this, is to confess it indefensible, and to surrender the cause.

As freedom of opinion is the spirit of liberty in the world, so it is the spirit of charity in the Church. A man who holds the vital doctrines of grace, believing them in his heart, confessing them with his lips, advocating them with his pen, and evincing them in

his life, may reprehend the practical shortcomings of the Church, without justly incurring the charge of infidelity, or that of intentionally giving aid and comfort to her enemies.

Holding these, he may differ from her brethren, as to their non-essential modifications, and yet not merit the harsh and bigotted denunciation of infidel; else, how shall the many denunciations of evangelical Christendom be accommodated in the kingdom of heaven? Shall one set itself up as the church, *sine quâ non*, excommunicate all the rest, and deliver them over to uncovenanted mercy? This might have succeeded in hushing the voice of free thought and opinion, in the papal-bound despotism of the dark ages, but *now* it is *too late*. The spirit of the present age, both in church and state, is at war with it. The world has abjured that hoary wrong; it "has put off the old man with his deeds." That is, the sanctified purpose is born, and the conflict of the princi-

ples of the new world with the lingering principles of the old, like the struggle of grace with corruption in the renewed soul, is pressing on to conquest.

Our author is no decrifier of the inspiration of the Scriptures, but one who receives them as of supreme authority, in matters of faith and practice: a member of the Protestant Church, seeing evils in the world which he thinks it her mission to correct, he ventures to admonish her of what he considers to be her duty. Being her friend, he is the more bold and free in his strictures. If he had been less severe, his book might have been tame and unreadable, and thus have failed of its object; in aiming to avoid this, he may have gone upon the opposite extreme of undue severity; he recognises the purity of her system of doctrine, but reprehends her dereliction in practice. Right doctrine often exists with defective practice, seldom the reverse. The Church is yet militant, not only outwardly but inwardly; neither objectively nor sub-

jectively, does she yet assume to be perfect, but pressing after that high state: surely then she will not anathematize one who by reminding her of a failure would aid her pursuit.

But alas! for the poor Church, often injured in the house of her friends, a member, imagining that she has been assailed, waxes very zealous for the Lord of Hosts, volunteers as her champion, and issues "A Review;" a member, we say, presuming that such is his position, from the fact of his gratuitous championship of the Christian cause, not from any manifestation of the Christian spirit in the Review, which is harshly exasperated, and bitterly and coarsely personal. It breathes on every page a splenetic and spiteful spirit, as of one of whom some wedded and untenable prejudice had been attacked. Its whole tone is haughty and dogmatical. It treats its subject as if evidence and argument were no helps to the judgment of its assumed infallibility; as if he whom it anathematized as an infidel surely

must be so ; no Papal *fiat* could make it more certain.

It would be more difficult, from the internal evidence of their respective books, to prove the author of *New Themes* an infidel, than his reviewer a Pharisee, a religionist who would officially drop a tract at the door, where he would scorn to stop and minister a persuasive word. It requires but a superficial reader to detect his religious stand-point, and find confirmation of what has been before suggested. Every chapter betrays it, and the fact explains all the phenomena of his book, the chief of which is its arrogant denunciation.

Thus inspired, the Reviewer begins. Assuming the author of *New Themes* to be an infidel, he tortures, garbles, exaggerates, and misrepresents his book, to prop up his foregone conclusion. Lest he should not find sufficient material, he first seizes the title, which, because it addresses the Protestant clergy, he considers evidence, *prima facie*, that the au-

thor is a renegade from Protestantism to Rome. As well might he infer, from an author who should write on the liberty of constitutional states, with special reference to the United States, did he take for a title, "The Principles of American Liberty," that such a one implied by it, a disbelief in the existence of free principles in any other constitution than our own.

But we must not visit this Layman's logical delinquencies too closely.

LETTER IV.

THE task of the reviewer of *New Themes* has been that of treasuring passing remarks,—of catching the sparks emitted by others—of seizing the dart hurled by other hands. He has shown a degree of patience and skill, which gives fair promise of his future critical career.

He has, besides, entered into his work with such hearty good will, and used his second-hand weapons with such evident design to hurt, that he clearly evinces a disposition to be unsparing, if not destructive. Such blows as he deals, if they fall not upon the object intended, must, at least, wrench the arm which inflicts them. It is very possible that his use of weapons, forged by stouter hands, may, in the result, prove injurious to a champion, so much more willing than strong.

It were a pity to disturb the excessive complacency with which this worthy Lay-

man now fills the chair of reviewer. It might be disastrous, just now, to extinguish this light of the Church. The Church is safe—with such a champion in front any number of the timid can crouch beneath the broad covert, and be safe from heresy, infidelity, and socialism.

The office of critic, assumed, in this instance, with such innocent confidence, is open, in our free country, to all comers, and denote chiefly, in the first place, the good opinion which the critic has of himself, and secondarily, reminds one very forcibly of the fable of Phædrus, *de vitiis Hominum* :—

“Peras imposuit Jupiter nobis duas :
 Propriis repletam vitiis post tergum dedit,
 Alienis ante pectus suspendit gravem.
 Hac re videre nostra mala non possumus ;
 Alii simul delinquant, censores sumus.”

“Jupiter gave to every man a sack,
 To hold his faults and carry on his back ;
 Another, Jupiter gave, which from his breast
 Hung heavy with his neighbour's faults oppressed :
 On this account, man never can behold
 His own, but can his neighbour's faults unfold.”

But terms should not mislead. The idea of a critic or reviewer, may suggest to persons, not in the habit of careful discrimination, such names as Dr. Johnson, Dr. Parr, Jeffrey, and Brougham; they were critics, but such men have no exclusive title to the name or the office.

The Barings are merchants; so are the retailers at the corners of a country village. A hundred pound ball comes crushing from a Paixhan, and a pennyweight plug of paper comes from a pop-gun. Yet both are guns; the calibre and strength only differ. So in the domain of criticism, from the great critics above-named down, down a long literary declivity, through grade below grade, to the reviewer of *New Themes*. But this reviewer is not to be estimated by this long interval between him and the learned men whose names are given; he is really respectable: this can be explained. The schoolmaster and the schoolmistress are both abroad. Reading, writing, composition, and grammar, are widely taught, and even the dullest intellects are daily drilled

into fair attainments in these accomplishments.

In the days of Bacon, and long after, many a learned man and profound thinker, was far from being a proficient in spelling, or style, punctuation, or grammar.

The progress of education has wiped away that reproach to literature ; everybody can write now, and nearly everybody does write. Authors of this day not unfrequently even disdain the printer's aid in punctuation and spelling. We have now myriads of books, for the most part well written ; they do credit to the schoolmaster and the schoolmistress. These have done their part, they have done what they could ; but they could not make thinkers, and thinking has not kept pace with writing. The difficulty has now become more formidable to tell whether the author one is reading is dealing in thoughts, or in words merely ; whether he thinks for himself, or relates the thoughts of others, or whether there is any thought involved.

It is not an unfrequent remark, in this happy country, that the housemaid dresses as well as her mistress, and strangers can no longer be sure, in the streets, whether they are admiring the mistress or the maid. So literary distinctions have been levelled. It is only for the throng of the educated now to determine in what department they intend to shine.

Criticism is that which suits the humblest intellect, as it requires the least literary capital, whilst there is an air of importance about it which falls in very well with the inclination of those who have no other way of distinguishing themselves so easily. Criticism is consistent with the smallest attainments, because its province is mainly finding fault—an office in which almost every one is, if not a proficient, at least in very large practice.

Besides, the critic can scarcely select an author whose faults are not already pointed out, and in circulation. It is but the work of a scribe to select these stray criticisms

and work them up into chapters, and adorn them with the graces of style, adding merely the standard phrases of censure which occur in all works of criticism, and which a ready writer can apply with slight change to any author or any subject.

A critic may venture before the public on this plan with success if he will stick to his trade, which is censure—straightforward, positive, unqualified, from which if he depart, in any attempt at discussion or explanation, it is all over with him; ignorance and shallowness and all other insufficiency stand forth unmistakeably recognised. Thus it has happened to the Reviewer of *New Themes*.

His reproaches and his censure, gathered from all the channels in which they circulate, are propounded in the approved and oft-repeated phrases of current criticism. Of the truth of such of these as are well founded, the writer of *New Themes* is probably more entirely aware than those with whom they may have originated.

LETTER V.

It is very curious to notice how very distant this Reviewer stands, from any just conception of the meaning of the volume before him. This is so conspicuous that he may be placed at the head of that uncomprehending class who never understand anything that is not plainly set down in some one of the Guide Books by which they make their way through life.

Very many minds of high culture, of great intelligence, and steadily pious frame, have promptly understood the general scope of this volume, and have, with various exceptions given their hearty approval.

They have failed to discover, what this *compiler* of the Review saw so quickly—whether with his own eyes or another's, is impossible to tell—that the book is a crusade against the Christian religion, by an

arrant unbeliever, but have regarded, and do regard it, as a simple protest against Christian Pharisaism; against the disposition so generally cherished, which induces men professing to be governed by the spirit of Christ, to say to the poor, "Go, be ye warmed, be ye filled," while it lifts not a finger for their relief. They find in it a protest against fanaticism and the barren inoperative theology of the schools, but not even one "wound of a friend," inflicted upon the body of Christ.

And these approvers of the general aim and spirit of the work are not confined to any denomination of Christians, but have been found among all.

The Reviewer, with the papal shout of "Heresy," and the insidious whisper of "Socialism," has pronounced utter condemnation, guiltless, let it be confessed, of knowing what he condemns. He charges the author with being illogical, and reasoning in a circle; but that should not bear very hard upon

the literary sensibility of one who neither reasons directly, nor inversely, nor in a circle; who never begs a question, not knowing when a question is to be begged, nor scarcely when a question is involved.

If the host of English, Scotch, and continental writers, who have been engaged in these important questions touching the interest of the poor could have been present to receive the Reviewer's solution of some of their graver difficulties, it would have been worth while to observe the look of blank astonishment which would have shrouded their faces, and perhaps hear Dr. Chalmers exclaim, "Hoot mon! Hoot mon! ye ken na mair what ye're speaking about than ye ken of the fish in the Dead Sea."

This work of A Layman will not be without its service. Literary coxcombs will be warned not to crow until they are out of danger; not to rush into any print but the print of their own retreating footsteps; and

not to give advice until they are old enough to take care of themselves.

Self-appointed critics may learn to tarry on the stool of caution until they are ready to expiate folly and rashness on the rack of torture; and fledgling Reviewers, that they must not mistake their critical propensities for the promptings of knowledge, much less of common sense; and that they should not exalt themselves above all compassion for literary aspirants.

Men may find in this review lamentable evidence that ignorance is not always innocence, and that very pugnacious intentions to injure may be combined with very small ability to hurt. They may discover that it is better for persons having very youthful qualifications to keep near the maternal eye and leave the Reviewer's task to those who have character and endowment.

It is a matter of regret that a highly respectable individual, like the "Layman," should not better conceal the authorship of

the Review, on account of his future prospects, and that he had not given his hours of composition to the more profitable employment of storing his mind with the commodity of knowledge, which should bear a high price, as we may justly infer from its rarity in that region. Such acquisitions might make his future criticisms as richly profitable as they are now empty and prompt, and make him as slow to condemn what he cannot comprehend, as he is now ready to exhibit ignorance of which he is not aware.

If such needful additions should ever be made to his mental furniture, the wiser man will not lightly imitate the thoughtless youth in crying Heretic and Infidel, for he will then know that thousands of the best men the world has ever known perished at the stake, under the Satanic rage of those who made no other charge than that of heresy. If men do not perish now under this charge of infidelity, it is not for the want of the spirit of persecution, nor of deadly malice in perse-

cutors, but because they are disarmed, and, having no other weapon more formidable, they vent their rage in words, but, happily, they are not

“Words that burn.”

If they were, woe to the man who should dare to think of reading the Bible for himself.

Very truly.

LETTER VI.

THE unfairness of the reviewer provokes me into a spirit which I must desist from. He does not prove one defect, nor even refer to our author's theory of doctrine, upon which alone the charge of infidelity could be justly based. He only attacks his theory of Christian practice, which, as it takes its own private interpretation of the Scriptures as its basis, and does not reject their authority, cannot constitute a man an infidel, however defective in the judgment of others. He assumes that because our author maintains that Protestant Christianity has failed of its duty as to charity, that he would have it abolished, which is false. He proposes no such thing, nor any substitute, but that it be reinfused with the spirit of Christ and his apostles. He uses "failure" in the sense of short-coming and defect in the exercise of inherent energy—not of incompetence and

absolute inadequacy to the object of its mission, as the reviewer assumes. It is infidelity to assail the gospel of divine revelation—not to expose the imperfections and derelictions of those to whom its grace is committed. Even Paul owned that he was but an earthen vessel. How much more may we, and even his self-styled *successors*!

You will find much in confirmation of our author's book in Mayhew's London Labour and London Poor. He asserts from observation that many of the lower classes of opposite sexes live together without marriage, because unable to pay the marriage fee which the clergy demand.

The reviewer misrepresents our author's theory of charity, as contemplating only the indiscriminate and inconsiderate distribution of alms to the poor; whereas, it looks to their intellectual and moral elevation, in affording to them the means of education and of grace, which the rich have invested with so much expense and refinement, as to be in-

accessible. There is no objection to these in the case of those who have the means to command and the taste to appreciate them; but it is absurd to expect the poor, with their low means and tastes, to be transported into the midst of them, and feel at home. The author of *New Themes* would have us give the poor labourer higher wages, and bring the gospel down to his door and capacity, and raise him thence.

We understand that the *Review of New Themes* is soon to be followed by another labour of the same kind, though we trust not as premature, for the sake of the perpetuity of the paternal name. One cannot keep from recalling the olden legend of the Titanic race—"haters of light, lovers of darkness"—who attempted to shut out the rising morning from their vision, as well as that of the world, and therefore piled Pelion on Ossa, and Olympus on Pelion; but, despite all their efforts, the bright sun came peering o'er their loftiest heights, magnificently fair,

and down the mountain's slant poured the intolerable day. Meanwhile, we are told, the laboriously piled hills came toppling down, and beneath the ruin hid the giant's grave.

We are told that the author of *New Themes*, though he discovers an error in the system of charity in use at present, does not offer any substitute.

When Galileo discovered the satellites of Jupiter—when Newton studied the lunar motions—were they asked by the mariners to pilot them across the deep?

When Oersted discovered the principles of electro-magnetism, was he asked to play the clerk of the telegraph office?

When the chemist, through high research, had discovered the analysis of coal, was he asked to apply one of its gaseous elements to the lamps of our houses or streets?

No; it is unfair to demand the philosopher to assume the post of the utilitarian.

His is the higher aim to unfold the powers

of divine skill—to develope the laws of divine government. He leaves to others the application of the remedies involved in these principles.

We thus compare the position of the moral philosopher to that of the physical one; not because we are ignorant of important differences in the kind of discovery made by each, but because, for the purpose of the argument, there is a real analogy. Notwithstanding it must be admitted whatever may be revealed by the moralist is indeed not so much new truth as old truth newly applied, yet, practically, the latter is often as important as the former.

While, therefore, our author proposes no remedy for the sad evils of our social state beyond a better observance of the second great command of the law, we hold that it may still have all the value of a new principle, if men, by his elucidation of its true character and exhortations to keep it, can be brought in some better measure than here-

tofore to acknowledge how shamefully blind they have been to this obligation, which, though scorned as trite by selfishness and formalism, has an ever-increasing beauty and scope to those who regard it as a transcript of that divine love which shines alike on the evil and the good.

I am, dear sirs, yours, very truly.

LETTER VII.

ON first reading the Review of New Themes, by A Layman, I was greatly at loss to account for the attempted severity of the reviewer. I am now told that he is a layman of the Episcopal Church, and the problem in my own mind is solved—"et hinc illæ lachrymæ!" You know my respect for the Church, and will not suspect me of insensibility to anything calculated to impair her Christian influence; and yet I must confess I discover in New Themes nothing to awaken my apprehensions and alarm me, as does this modest (*stat nominis umbra!*) author. For his sake, I regret the haste with which he has written, and his evident determination to turn to ridicule and to consign to contempt the views he undertakes to censure. That cannot be done, sirs. Beside, how much pre-

ferable, more creditable, and profitable, had been a calm, grave, kind, and courteous investigation and interchange of thought.

Doubtless, *New Themes* is susceptible of improvement—of modification of statements in some cases—of statement of opinion I mean—but surely there is no ground to infer from it that the author is an unbeliever, and labouring insidiously to undermine our common Christianity.

As I understand the author of the book which has brought down upon his head such a torrent of denunciation, he finds cause of complaint, not in the principles and precepts of Christianity, but in the practice of Christians. And if there be not such, let it be *shown*—let not the reviewer content himself with assertions merely, but let him give us proof. The *onus* is with him, and we cannot release him except he meet more fairly and evince more clearly the fallacies of the author of *New Themes*.

That Mr. C.'s theory of charity is alto-

gether misapprehended by our worthy reviewer, is beyond a doubt. He assumes that it is by an unreflecting and indiscriminate outpouring of alms that the poor are to be relieved. How could he lose sight of the fact that the language and statements of Mr. C. imply no such thing? How could he forget—especially when reading the book with the eye of a critic, and with the intention of reviewing it—that the questions of spiritual and intellectual improvement—of regard rather for the individual than for the mass—of increase of wages to the poor—“*et id omne genus*”—enter into his calculation, and help to form his theory?

That the New Themes are widely circulated, I have ample means of knowing; that, since the appearance of the Review, they are more than ever extensively read, I also know; that they will continue, despite the Review, to be read by wise and good men, at least until some abler “Richmond takes the field,”

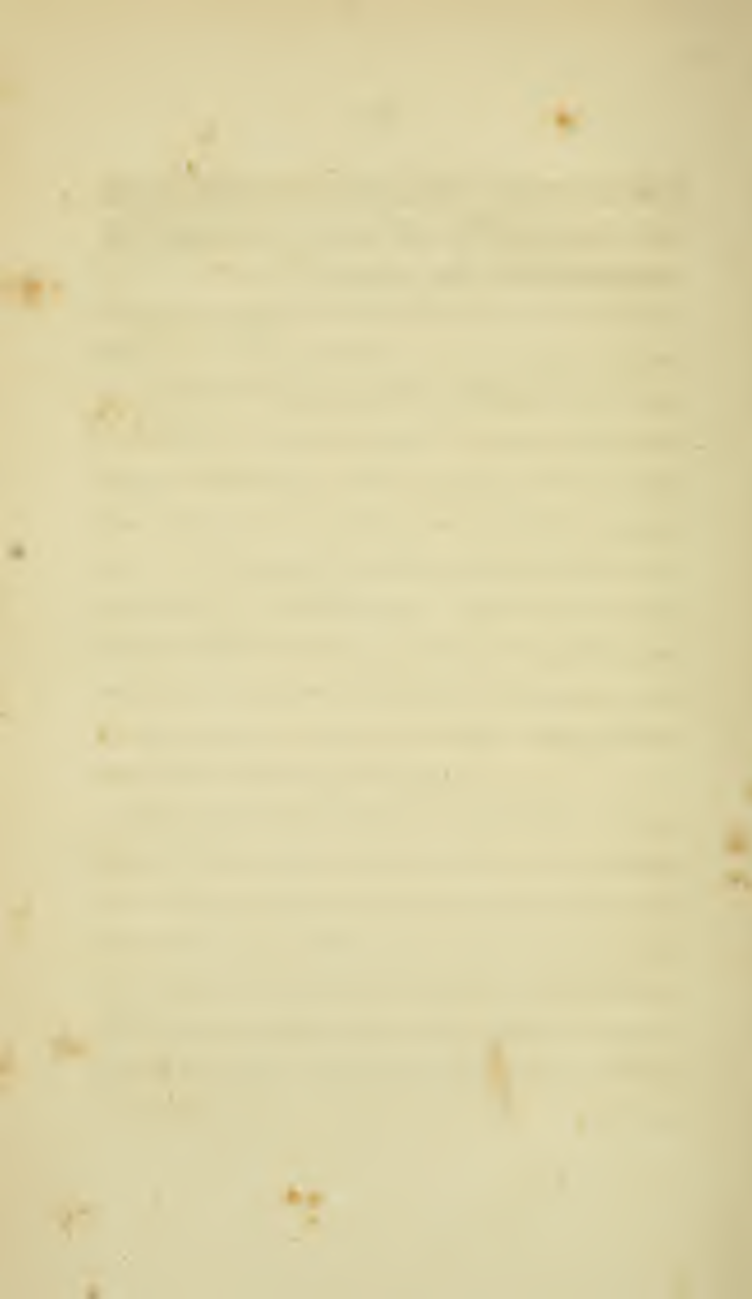
I do not doubt. That they may produce the effect designed by the worthy Christian author, is the fervent prayer of

EPISCOPUS.*

* Not Episcopalian—but vide 1 Timothy 3:1.

NOT

THE END.





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